

26 august 2019

México: Smear campaigns against members of The Colectivo Fiscalía que Sirva Guanajuato and Colectivo por la Libertad de Expresión en Guanajuato.

In recent months months, members of the *Colectivo Fiscalía que Sirva Guanajuato* and the *Colectivo por la Libertad de Expresión en Guanajuato* have been subjected to smear campaigns on social networks and usurpation of Twitter accounts.

[The Colectivo Fiscalía que Sirva Guanajuato \(FQSG\)](#) is a group of activists, journalists and human rights defenders who monitor compliance with international law standards in the General Prosecutor's Office' work. It is part of the national collective, Fiscalia Que Sirva (FQS), which is comprised of 300 organisations and collectives from all over the country. FQS combats impunity in México by proposing legal changes to improve the rule of law.

[Colectivo por la Libertad de Expresión en Guanajuato](#) is a group composed of more than 30 journalists and human rights defenders who promote the free exercise of journalism and the right to freedom of expression. The independent platform is present in several municipalities of Guanajuato. Formed in 2014, the *Colectivo* has participated in the process of approval of the Law for the Protection of Journalists and Human Rights Defenders in Guanajuato, in the drafting regulations, and is part of the State Protection Council, chaired by the Secretary of Government.

[Raymundo Sandoval](#) is an academic, human rights defender, member of *Colectivo Fiscalia que Sirva Guanajuato*, and coordinator of *Colectivo por la Libertad de Expresión en Guanajuato*. He has accompanied several social movements in the region and teaches university courses about different human rights topics, particularly about violence against women, state oversight and the promotion of freedom of expression.

Since February 2019, Raymundo Sandoval is suffering an ongoing smear campaign on Twitter, characterised by targeted attacks from at least 20 anonymous accounts. On 26 April 2019, his Twitter account was taken control of and misused to send messages contradicting his human rights work. These attacks were described by Twitter as an "impersonation attack". At Raymundo Sandoval's request, his Twitter account, through which he carries out most of his advocacy work, was cancelled.

In April 2019, other members of *Colectivo por la Libertad de Expresión en Guanajuato*, including **Arnoldo Cuellas, Verónica Espinosa and Kennia Velázquez** were also targeted through a smear campaign on social networks through a list called "Huachicoleros" (a term used to describe a person selling illegal fuel), which was created by a Twitter user with the aim of criminalising their work.

Front Line Defenders believes that the protection of human rights defenders and journalists is essential given the current context of attacks, which it believes will intensify this week as a result of a hearing scheduled for 29 August 2019, in which FQS seeks to appeal the appointment of the General Prosecutor of the state of Guanajuato on grounds of a lack of participation of civil society and academia in the process.

It also believes that it is of utmost importance to recognise and protect the work of human rights defenders and journalists in Guanajuato, as they carry out the fundamental task of informing the population.

Front Line Defenders urges the Guanajuato authorities to

1. Conduct an investigation into the digital attacks against Raymundo Sandoval and other human rights defenders promoting freedom of expression in Guanajuato;
2. Show public recognition for the valuable human rights work done by human rights defenders and journalists in the state, as a basic pillar of the right to freedom of expression, in order to reduce the risk of further attacks:
3. Take the necessary measures to ensure that all human rights defenders in Mexico can carry out their legitimate human rights activities free of any restrictions.

Front Line Defenders respectfully reminds you that the United Nations Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted by consensus by the UN General Assembly on 9 December 1998, recognises the legitimacy of the activities of human rights defenders, their right to freedom of association and to carry out their activities without fear of reprisals. We would particularly draw attention to Article 6 (b and c): “Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others: (b) As provided for in human rights and other applicable international instruments, freely to publish, impart or disseminate to others views, information and knowledge on all human rights and fundamental freedoms; (c) To study, discuss, form and hold opinions on the observance, both in law and in practice, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms and, through these and other appropriate means, to draw public attention to those matters”, and to Article 12 (1 and 2): “(1) Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to participate in peaceful activities against violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms. (2) The State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration.

Please inform us of any actions that may be taken with regard to the above case.

Yours sincerely,



Andrew Anderson
Executive Director

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